

**Maoist People's War and the  
Revolution of Everyday  
Life in Nepal**

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# **Maoist People's War and the Revolution of Everyday Life in Nepal**

Ina Zharkevich



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# Introduction


In 2008, two years after the end of the Maoist People's War, one still had to walk above the monsoon clouds to get to the village of Thabang—the capital of the Maoist base area of Nepal during the civil war of 1996–2006. With the monsoon in full swing and landslides in full force, the short stretch of the unpaved motorable road leading to Thabang from the nearest bazaar town had to be trodden on foot. Two days of walking would bring one to a scenic village on a plateau, about 2,000 metres above sea level, nestled in the hills reaching much higher. Red flags flying over the village gates marked the territory of Thabang as belonging to the Maoist stronghold. With electricity still non-existent, except in the Maoist Women's Model Village in one of the hamlets, and with a few landline phones being the only means of reaching the wider world, Thabang in 2008 could still be characterized as a 'remote' place (see Figures I.1– I.4).

In 2008, the traces of the People's War and the Maoist regime of governance were everywhere: the rustic 'hotel' was run by members of the Maoist commune; the village medical shop was run by one of the Maoist 'barefoot doctors', part of the medical brigades who took care of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) fighters during the war; the strongest drink one would get from the Maoist-run cooperative 'hotel' would be tea, generously spiced with cardamom and black pepper, commercially brewed alcohol being still banned in the entire village (see Figures I.5 and I.6). The Maoist commune, founded at the height of the conflict in 2004, was still full of life, its members working in the communal fields and developing ideas for organic farming. Children from the main village and the commune were still attending the Maoist Model School, where Maoist textbooks were used to instil communist values in children right from the first grade. The names of some children in the Maoist Model School—'Sunmukti' (freed from gold), 'Yuddha' (war), 'Sangharsha' (struggle)—served as a living memory of a set of values that preoccupied the generation of their parents, who had participated in the Maoist revolutionary endeavour only a few years ago.

By 2011, the time of my fieldwork, the Maoist Model School did not exist anymore. The commune was going through a difficult time: with just ten permanent adult members, people in the commune could only remember the times of war when its membership had reached more than a hundred members. By 2016, the Maoist

commune became part of history with post-war reality, political squabbles, and the compulsion to earn a living having shattered the wartime egalitarian ethos and collective spirit, as well as property, in the commune. Children who had been sent to the Maoist Model School earlier were now sent to private boarding schools in Dang, with none of the children showing any signs of having been 'brainwashed' by Maoist ideology and textbooks—the paranoia that plagued human rights organizations and Kathmandu-based media during the war. In 2016, the names of newborns in Thabang bore little trace of the Maoist mores and much more reference to the resurgence of ethnic identity politics and one's pride in 'roots': they would be named in the indigenous language of Kham and were imbued with romantic meanings such as 'our reflection' (Ginsang) or 'our heart' (Geyung), not the wartime Maoist refrain of 'freed from gold' (Sunmukti) or the standard Nepali name, 'braveheart' (Birbahadur), that used to be popular in the village before the conflict. 

By 2016, one could reach Thabang from the district headquarters of Libang through the famous Martyr's Road (Shahid Marg), a reminder of the grandeur and scope of the Maoist vision of development during the war. Built through a combination of voluntary and coerced labour during the war—with the villagers having been summoned for construction work from surrounding districts, in 2016 the Martyr's Road was an unpaved dusty track that would take seven to eight hours to cover a distance of less than 50 kilometres. Two further roads, coming from the east and the west, made their way to Thabang—a previously unremarkable and remote village, now hailed as a centre of the Maoist revolution. With roads, a long-cherished dream of the villagers, came change.

By 2017, Thabang was turning into a bazaar, with every corner of the village marked with a small shop. The sale of commercial liquor was rampant, and cases of domestic violence were on the rise; child marriages and lavish mortuary rites—the 'backward traditions' that Maoists had tried to eradicate during the war—were back. The spirit of bitter disillusionment had set in. Some of the former PLA fighters became international migrants, working for the forces of global capitalism in the Gulf, Japan, and even the thers, cynical of the post-conflict politics of the Maoist establishment, turned into entrepreneurs. Some of the former Maoist whole-timers regretted having joined the Maoist struggle, narrating shocking stories of the ways in which Maoist cadres who went through all the years of the war were treated by the party leadership in the wake of the conflict. Having been asked by Prachanda, a former leader of the Maoist guerrillas and now the leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), to remain in the 'open,' that is, not to enter cantonments for the former Maoist combatants, these Maoist cadres, many of whom had fought for years in the PLA, were soon to find out that they were effectively excluded from the



**Figure I.1** Walking above the clouds

*Source:* Author.



**Figure I.2** The view of the main village as seen from one of the nearest hamlets. Note the close-knit pattern of Kham Magar settlements.

*Source:* Author.



**Figure I.3** Multiple hamlets scattered along the hills. Note the difference from the traditional closely-knit settlement pattern. 

*Source:* Author.



**Figure I.4** From mountainous paths to unpaved roads

*Source:* Author.



**Figure I.5** Traces of Maoism post-war: the entrance gate to the village and the main village adorned with Maoist flags

*Source:* Author.



**Figure I.6** One of the local artists painted the portraits of the world Communist leaders at the Western entrance to the main village (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao)

*Source:* Author.

reintegration process into the new Nepalese Army and from the financial support that those fighters stationed in the cantonments had a right to. Worse news was that some of the relatives of PLA commanders, who had never held a gun in their hands (nor were in the cantonments), were given the financial incentive that the revolutionary fighters who had gone through the hardest years of the war had been denied. That things were going wrong had been evident even in the cantonment before the ‘new army’ was born: some of the Maoist commanders had set up a separate kitchen for themselves—a kind of practice that was unimaginable during the ‘exceptional’ times of war in the underground Maoist universe, which made egalitarian modes of sociality a key element of its praxis and ideology.

Observing the post-war reality, one might ask, ‘What has changed, if anything at all?’ Have all the Maoist attempts to change human behaviour and unsettle hierarchies been futile? Has the Maoist regime of governance rested simply on the barrel of the gun and on the ‘exceptional’ times of war? The concept of revolution, borrowed from astronomy, originally meant the cyclical movement of celestial bodies ending in a return to the original position (Mazlish 2017: 8). However, it is never a return to quite the same point, particularly when it is a question of social revolutions. Despite the gradual ‘resurgence of tradition’ in some areas of social life, post-war Nepal witnessed a profound reconfiguration of social relations and social hierarchies that had everything to do with the Maoist People’s War. As this book shows further, ten years of the Maoist insurgency achieved a more profound transformation in social structures and ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams 1977: 132)—ways of thinking, relating, and living in the world—than many years of supposedly progressive legislation and modernization policies, which never reached the heart of unequal power relations between people of different gender, generation, caste, and ethnicity.

By providing a rich ethnography of wartime social processes, this book explores how the Maoist People’s War has radically transformed Nepali society within a period of less than ten years, and how revolutionary ideas became adopted and normalized in the fabric of people’s everyday lives. In showing how the arrival of Maoist ideology and ‘exceptional’ time of war made people adopt previously transgressive practices and recreate their lives, without necessarily intending to accomplish far-reaching social transformation, the book demonstrates that the everyday, while being a site of oppression and reproduction of social hierarchies, can also become a site of liberation and subversion of the rigid norms that were taken for granted in the past. In weaving together people’s accounts of social change triggered by the war, the dilemmas people faced during the conflict, and the unethical choices they made as part of the ‘exceptional’ nature of the wartime, this book reflects on the dialectical relationship between the micro-level of people’s

everyday practices and the macro-level of social transformation, between people's biographies, their agency, and the historical times they inhabit.

Based on long-term research in the Maoist wartime capital, which sacrificed thirty-four people to the cause of the revolution, this book hopes to convey a sense of what it meant to live through the years of war in a community that had little choice but to embrace the Maoist cause as theirs and wage a war, while hoping against hope for a better and peaceful future. By focusing both on people who wholeheartedly embraced the Maoist cause and those who can be best characterized as 'reluctant rebels', this book provides a multi-layered account of the history of the Maoist guerrilla heartland. Based on ethnographic research—participant observation in the Maoist capital after the end of the war and oral histories on war—this book explains why for a lot of people in Nepal, at least those in the Maoist base area, the People's War signified a change of epochs, with the change of times relating completely to the Maoist People's War and the wartime social processes.

## **Ethnography of Social Change and Norm-Remaking during the War**

In 1996, when Nepali Maoists attacked police posts in three remote districts of the country, no one in Nepal imagined that in five years a small group of guerrillas armed with two rustic rifles would soon be controlling large swathes of rural Nepal and that in a decade they would become the largest mainstream political party in the Constituent Assembly elections.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, no one could imagine that what started off as a rebellion in the backwaters of the country would become a central force in the making of one of the most recent revolutions in the world that would transform Nepal from a Hindu kingdom to a secular republic.<sup>2</sup> Unlike a lot of recent revolutions worldwide that can be more accurately described as political coups or

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<sup>1</sup> CPN(M) was the abbreviation for the Maoist political organization during the civil war. In 2009, the party renamed itself the United Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (UCPN[M]) following unification with the former splinter group Masal. In 2012, a hardliner group within UCPN(M), headed by Mohan Vaidya, left the mainstream party and formed Nepal Communist Party–Maoist Revolutionary (CPN-M, known popularly as the 'dash Maoists'). More recently, the mainstream Maoists were named the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). In this book, I will use the name applicable at a particular historical time, that is, 'CPN(M)', when talking about the wartime.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'secularism' is a translation of the Nepali term *dharmā nirapeksata* (meaning autonomous from/impartial to *dharmā*), which in the context of contemporary Nepal and broader South Asia means 'equal respect and opportunities for all religions', not the separation

change of governments, Nepal is a rare example of political restructuring of the state that was accompanied by a profound reconfiguration of the social fabric and social structures, such as caste, gender, generation, and ethnicity.

‘Times have changed’ (*jamana badliyo*) was a common idiom used by people in the Maoist base area of Nepal five years after the end of the civil war. For people in the former ‘red belt’ of Nepal, the People’s War symbolized the end of the ‘old’ world as people have known it—the world when cows were more sacred than humans, when lower-caste people were considered less pure than high castes and when they were ‘rightfully’ barred from entering high caste’s houses, and when ancestral spirits were propitiated as a matter of routine, not reflexive practice. It was also the end of times when the public sphere was dominated by high castes, when women and ethnic minority groups were rarely represented in the Parliament, and when the absence of dissent was taken for a harmonious co-existence of more than one hundred different ethnic groups populating the country rather than a sign of repression. In short, for people in the former Maoist base area, the civil war was a watershed separating different epochs. As one of the elders in the Maoist base area explained to me:

Before the Maoists—during the *panchayat* times [the partyless regime from 1962 until 1990]—there was no change. It was the ‘dumb’ [ignorant] time [*latho jamana*]. We could not understand anything. ‘Let us do this way’—there was no wish. It is only now that there has been some change— all are studying, understanding the language [Nepali]. Earlier people were ‘dumb’. In the past, people could not even speak Nepali here....

While many urban Nepalis assert that the Maoist conflict set the country back by several decades on the scale of development and that it has unleashed the dangerous forces of ethnic nationalism, inter-ethnic violence, and a hitherto unknown descent into corruption, people in the Maoist base area stressed the positive impact of the People’s War: its civilizing and enlightening mission of saving marginalized people on the periphery of the state from a condition of ignorance and stagnation, returning dignity and recognition to groups who were traditionally excluded from the public domain.

So, why is the People’s War accorded such a prominent place in the imaginary of common people in the Maoist base area of Nepal? In what ways has the conflict been deeply transformative? By exploring changes in everyday life during the war and its aftermath, this book sets out to understand how the situation of war

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of religion from the state. For a detailed discussion of ‘secularism’ in Nepal, see Letizia (2011: 70–72).

reorders societies, and how people of different social locations, whether defined by generation or gender, caste or class, remake their worldviews and social practices during situations of conflict. In doing so, I build on the idea that the situation of war and revolution often represents a unique site for exploring the processes of social change and understanding how political upheavals affect the everyday life of people, their moral values, and the norms they abide by (Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren 2002; Hann 1994; Lubkemann 2008; Richards and Fithen 2004).

This book is an ethnographic account of social change and norm-remaking brought about by the civil war in Nepal (1996–2006).<sup>3</sup> By exploring how the spatial and temporal dimension of Nepal's civil war—the creation of a guerilla enclave which functioned as a parallel state and the exceptional nature of wartime—came together in transforming people's everyday lives, their practices, and schemas of perception, this book uncovers the social processes at war. Building on recent scholarship in the anthropology of war which argues that wars should be understood as an aspect of the social process, rather than as an abrupt rupture and breakdown of social relations (Richards 2005; Lubkemann 2008; Englund 2002), I focus on understanding what happens to people's everyday lives and their values during conflict and its aftermath. Thus, rather than exploring extraordinary and exotic aspects of the conflict situation, such as violence or torture, which have received considerable attention in recent years in the anthropology of conflict (Das et al. 2000; Nordstrom 1997, 2004; Robben 1995; Robben and Suárez-Orozco 2000; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Waterston 2009), I scrutinize 'normal' life during times of war. Such an approach is particularly important in the present day, because living in a situation of protracted civil conflicts has become a usual mode of being in many parts of the world, to the extent that the condition of war has become a norm and a context within which people's daily lives unfold (see Vigh 2008 on crisis).

I take the drama and the banality of the everyday as a point of departure for analysing processes of social change triggered by the war. By focusing on a set of people's everyday practices in the former Maoist heartland, not on the military or political aspects of the People's War, I illuminate how the everyday becomes a primary site of revolution: of crafting new subjectivities, introducing 'new' social practices and displacing the 'old' ones, and reconfiguring the ways people act *in* and think *about* the world. Scrutinizing the project of the Maoist Cultural Revolution

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<sup>3</sup> Supporters of the Maoist cause commonly refer to the civil war of 1996–2006 as the People's War (*janyuddha*), as do many non-Maoists. However, many Nepalis consider that it was only a small proportion of the population that waged the war, not the people of Nepal. The book will refer to the conflict as the civil war or the People's War.

on the one hand and how people of both genders, different generations, and diverse castes responded to it during ‘exceptional’ times of war, I demonstrate the ways in which the wartime social processes exert a long-term impact on Nepali society.

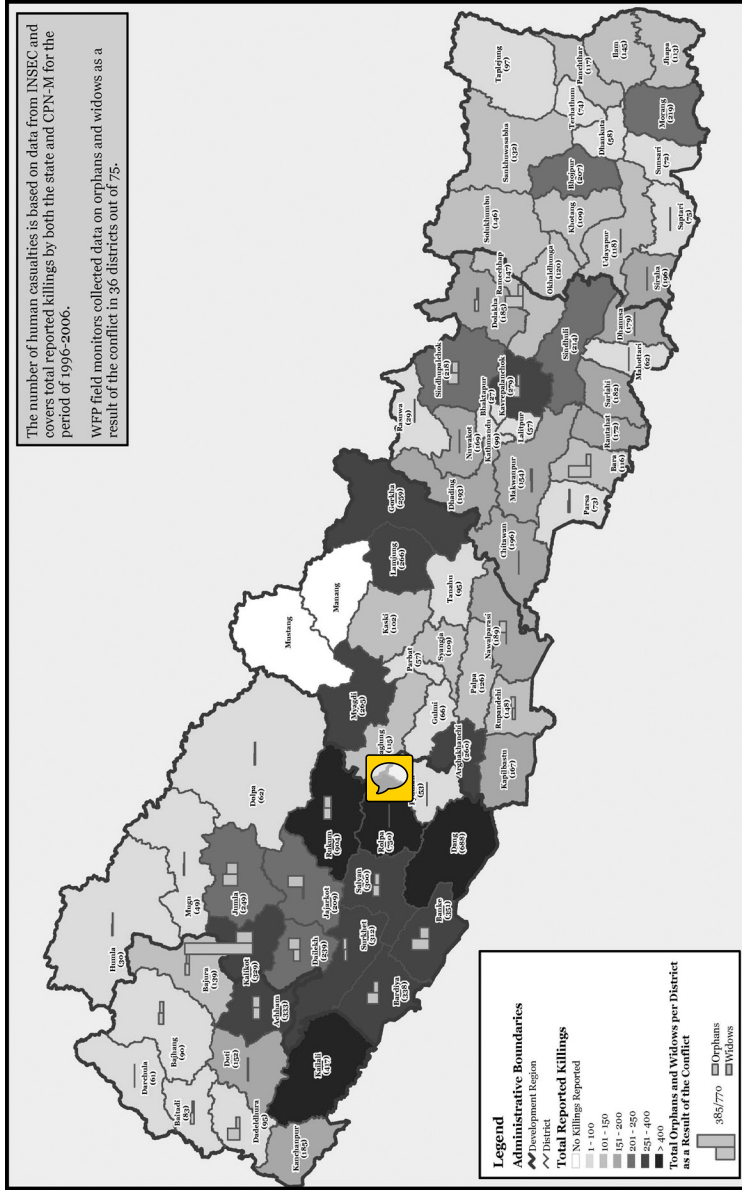
The village of Thabang in the district of Rolpa is an ethnographic departure for this book. Situated in the backwaters of the country and hardly known to anyone before the war, Thabang emerged as a ‘cradle’ of the Maoist revolution after the end of the conflict, celebrated by the Maoist establishment as the birthplace of the Nepali Revolution. During the war, Thabang was known as the unofficial capital of the Maoist base area<sup>4</sup> and the district of Rolpa became synonymous with a guerrilla heartland. The revolutionary fame of Rolpa was so strong that villagers on the fringes of the Maoist-controlled area automatically assumed that incoming Maoist workers came from Rolpa (Lecomte-Tilouine 2013a: 250). Thabang was the place where Maoists<sup>5</sup> formed the first people’s government after the retreat of the state in 1997, and where the PLA came to rest, obtain supplies, and retrain before major military operations (Figure I.7). In 2004, Maoists made Thabang the capital of the Magarant Autonomous Region, elevating an earlier undistinguished Kham Magar village to the status of the centre of the ethnic federalist region of Nepal. When the first national-level Maoist government was formed in 2008, Thabang was designated as one of fourteen model villages in fourteen administrative zones of Nepal and was allocated a considerable budget for development purposes.

Drawing on long-term fieldwork in Thabang, this book explores how a remote Himalayan village was forged as the centre of the Maoist rebellion, how its inhabitants

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term ‘Maoist base area’ to refer to the northeastern part of Rolpa district and the eastern part of Rukum district—the first Nepali districts where Maoists ‘cleared’ the state and began implementing their own system of governance through the so-called people’s governments. The Maoist base area was a remote region, without a single motorable road until 2004 and characterized by a difficult mountainous terrain, where guerrillas could successfully exercise power, gather economic resources, draw human resources, and obtain the popular support that was crucial for the Maoist movement, especially at the initial stage of the conflict.

<sup>5</sup> Since my research does not focus on the political history of the Maoist movement, which is characterised by a long history of fractures, I will use the term ‘Maoist’ in order to denote people who engaged in revolutionary, political, or ideological struggle against the Shah monarchy and the political status quo during the civil war. Since most of my research was carried out in 2011, before the latest multiple splits of the Maoist party, I do not distinguish between the mainstream and the hardliner Maoists in my book, except when mentioning more recent events. Even though many of the people in Thabang support the hardliner group, the Biplov faction, I deliberately choose not to engage with recent developments, because they are too far removed from the revolutionary politics of the wartime. For the political history of the communist movement in Nepal, see Thapa (2003), Hachhethu (2009), and Ogura (2008b).



**Figure 1.7 Human casualties, orphans, and widows due to the conflict**

Source: Based on map by Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations, Nepal, available at <https://www.unocha.org/media-centre/maps-infographics>

Note: Map not drawn to scale and does not represent authentic international boundaries.

coped with the situation of war and the Maoist regime of governance, and how they recreated their everyday lives and worldviews by adopting previously transgressive practices, such as beef-eating and inter-caste commensality, to name a few. By focusing on people who were located at the epicentre of the Maoist insurgency, including *both* ardent Maoist supporters and ‘reluctant rebels’ who were faced with stark moral dilemmas during the war, this book explores what it means to make choices and exercise agency within the ‘exceptional’ times of war when the only feasible choice available to people was often to go against one’s deeply held beliefs and when the only viable action was a radical departure from one’s usual everyday practice.

This book problematizes some of the post-war narratives surrounding ‘revolutionary’ Thabang and illustrate how we, as social sciences researchers, might at times contribute to the creation and perpetuation of historical narratives which are partial but which become *the history* of the place.<sup>6</sup> Thus, despite the fact that Thabang has been portrayed as a ‘village of resistance’ (Ogura 2007) and its people as ‘rebellious peasants’ who staged a series of rebellions and mutinies in the second half of the 20th century (Gidwani and Paudel 2012), I suggest that this reading of Thabang’s history does not give its due to the internal power dynamics within the village, to inequalities between the village notables and the common people, and to the view of the peasants themselves. The depiction of Thabang as a ‘village of resistance’ is rooted in a specific methodological stance—one which privileges the view of subaltern elites as a prime source of historical knowledge, and which does not provide sufficient attention to the difference between the narratives and perceptions of subaltern elites and ‘ordinary’ people within the so-called dominated groups.

Even in ‘revolutionary’ Thabang, many peasants were only ‘reluctant rebels’ who supported guerrillas for a whole range of reasons, which were often far from being ideological and involved a complex interplay of factors, such as kinship loyalties, moral solidarity with guerrillas, compliance with the Maoist regime of governance, and a quest for survival during the ‘exceptional’ times of war. By exploring relationships between Maoist guerrillas and ‘ordinary’ people in the Maoist base area, on the one hand, and relationships among Maoist whole-timers, on the other, I show that the People’s War and the evolution of the Maoist movement were enabled through a set of social processes and relationships, which had more to do with people’s affective ties, their sense of justice and experiences of pain inflicted by the state rather than a priori ideological affinity with rebels. By focusing on a set of social relations—blood ties between Maoist guerrillas and people in their base area

<sup>6</sup> See Shneidermann (2010) on the rewriting of history in Piskar village in northern Nepal.

on the one hand, and fraternal bonds, fictive kinship, and marital alliances within the Maoist movement on the other—I show that any attempt to understand the social dynamic of the People's War would not be possible without examining the relational side of the Maoist movement and revolutionary endeavour.

In examining the legacy of the People's War, I present a processual account of social change. Rather than merely asking the question of what changed and when, I focus on understanding *how* change comes about. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how people internalize ideas that were previously alien to them and how formerly transgressive practices become normalised in the fabric of post-war society, resulting in the transformation of rigid social structures. For instance, how is it that a decade of the People's War has done more for the transformation of inter-caste relations than the legislation outlawing caste discrimination that existed in Nepal for almost half a century? How can we explain the wartime normalization of beef-eating in a country where slaughter of cows was considered the most serious transgression of moral and legal orders, punishable, in the past, by death? Which other areas of social life have been most deeply transformed by the conflict?

These questions are especially important given the usual portrayal of Nepali society as rigid and conservative, characterized by entrenched caste, gender, religious, and ethnic discrimination, with cynics arguing that the People's War bore no fruit at all, limiting their view to the assessment of the current political disorder. I attempt to draw a more nuanced picture—the picture of a society undergoing a period of drastic change over a period of less than a decade, the change which might be more obvious should one take the everyday and people practices as a departing point of the analysis. While reading this book, it is crucial to bear in mind that the dynamic view of society presented here is rooted in research with a distinct group of people, the Kham Magars. Being one of the 'hill tribes' of Nepal,<sup>7</sup> Kham Magars have traditionally been less strict about following rigid caste rules and patriarchal gender norms, characteristic of Hindu caste groups in Nepal (of Indo-Aryan origin). It might not be coincidental that Maoists mapped their base area into the territory inhabited by 'hill tribes', who are usually portrayed to be more receptive to Maoist progressive policies because of their less hierarchical social structure—a point that will be explored further in more detail. However, while the civil war undoubtedly brought about profound

<sup>7</sup> In the context of Nepal, 'hill tribe' denotes an ethnic group, usually of Mongoloid origin, living in the hill belt of the country (the other two being lowland Tarai and the mountainous region). 'Hill tribes' have not been traditionally Hindu and are believed to have had a more egalitarian social structure than the caste groups in Nepal.

changes in the way Nepali society works, the spread of transformative processes is not equally distributed in different areas of Nepal. For instance, the Nepali Tarai (the southern belt of the country) still remains conservative and traditionalist in terms of caste and gender norms—a stark contrast to the hill community that will be described in this book.

This book proposes a distinct methodology of looking at social transformation. Rather than focusing on the extraordinary, whether acts of resistance or purposefully pursued projects of change, I show the importance of studying the quotidian as a means for grasping the processes of social change. By foregrounding the analysis of change in the ethnographic study of everyday life, I suggest that it is only through the study of mundane everyday practices that one can bridge the macro-scale of social transformation and micro-processes of change. By examining changes in everyday practices, whether it is consumption of previously taboo kinds of meat or rejection of previously staple alcohol, ways of worshipping gods or paying respect to one's parents, I endeavour to link the micro-level of change—subtle transformations of how people act and think, how they go about their daily lives, what values and ideas they accept—to structural changes in society. For practices of beef-eating are linked with the dominance of Hindu ideology, exemplified by the figure of the 'sacred cow', practices of sharing food and staying in distinct social spaces with the hierarchies of caste, practices of courtship with distinct constructions of gender relations, and, of course, practices of ancestral worship and religious observance with people's relationship to the divine.

By asking broader questions about the human condition and norm-(re)making during war, I hope to go beyond the boundaries of a distinct Nepali village and engage with other contexts where people's everyday lives were defined by conflict. Comparing Thabang with other villages in Nepal allows one to appreciate that despite the difference in historical contexts—and there will be as many contexts as there are villages on the map of Nepal—there are important universal features that underlie human experience in times of war. It also allows one to appreciate that an ethnographic study *in* the village, even if it is an atypical village, might talk to wider theoretical debates in the anthropology of war.

Drawing on Vigh's theorization of crisis (2008), I suggest that it is by studying *war as context* rather than by studying the context of war that one can properly perform one of the tasks of anthropology: understanding the human condition in times of war. That the specificity of the local and historicizing, that is, studying the context of war, is vital for understanding the dynamic of Nepal's conflict has been persuasively shown by a recent collection of papers, *Revolution in Nepal* (Lecomte-Tilouine 2013b). However, recent ethnographies of conflict, *Maoists at*

*the Hearth* by Pettigrew (2013), *In My Mother's House* by Thiranagama (2011), and Stephen's Lubkemann's *Culture in Chaos* (2008), illustrate that examining war as a social process enables one to see stories that are not just about violence, political struggle, or mobilization but rather about people's efforts to cope with uncertainty and fear, about human creativity and adaptability in dealing with structural violence, their capacity to maintain daily life and personal relations, fulfil social duties, and craft life-projects under the constraining condition of war.

Finally, it is important to note that this book is not about Maoism as a corpus of ideas. Neither is it about the history or evolution of Nepal's Maoist movement. Rather it is about how the People's War was lived through and experienced by people in the former Maoist heartland of Nepal, how Maoist ideas and policies were adopted by 'ordinary' villagers in the liminal situation of war, and how the revolutionary praxis during the war—adopted self-consciously or as part of the 'exceptional' times of war—transformed people's practical consciousness, that is, life as lived, not thought about.

## A History of Unfinished Revolutions in Nepal

The notion of social change is extremely difficult to pin down.<sup>8</sup> 'The more things change, the more they stay the same' is the French saying used by Anne de Sales to account for processes of social transformation in the Maoist-controlled areas of Nepal (2011b: 107). The trope alludes not so much to the impossibility of change but rather to the idea that continuity and change always go hand in hand.

The history of Nepal is an interesting illustration of this point. It stands as a peculiar example of the principle of continuity taking over what, at first sight, might seem to be periods of dramatic ruptures: three major revolutions in 1950–1951, 1990, and 1996–2006 over the course of a little more than fifty years.<sup>9</sup> The


<sup>8</sup> This section draws on Joshi and Rose (1966), Whelpton (2005), Hofman, Raepel and Whelpton (1999), and Ogura (2001).

<sup>9</sup> Since this book focuses on understanding social processes during the war and its aftermath, historical explorations of the conflict—its roots and causes, the political structure of the Maoist movement, and stages of the war—are outside the scope of this book. These themes have received extensive coverage in literature. There are a number of edited volumes which cover different aspects of the People's War, from its causes and the ideological programme of the party to the analysis of Maoist mobilization strategies and policies of the people's governments during the war (Hutt 2004a; Lawoti and Pahari 2009; Thapa 2003; Lecomte-Tilouine 2013a). For the military dimension of the war, see Cowan (2006, 2010) and Nepali and Subba (2005). For two recent socio-historical accounts see Adhikari (2014) and Jha (2014).



first revolution in 1950–1951 toppled the autocratic Rana regime but failed to bring about a democratic system of governance. In 1960, King Mahendra took all executive power in his hands and created the so-called *panchayat* partyless system. While the people's movement in 1990 succeeded in making Nepal a parliamentary monarchy of the Westminster type, it did not result in substantive changes in entrenched inequalities between people of different castes, ethnicities, and gender.

Recent political developments in Nepal show that the aftermath of revolutions comes as a great disappointment for most people. Former revolutionaries, the United Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (UCPN[M]), who emerged victorious in the first post-war elections in 2008, were effectively rejected by the electorate in the second Constituent Assembly elections in 2013. The overall historical pattern is repeated. The period of spectacular change at the political level is halted; former revolutionaries get co-opted into the political mainstream, reneging on the slogans of the revolution (partially because the modality of multi-party politics, with its forced existence of multiple interest groups who are able to block decisions, rules out the possibility of the easy implementation of progressive reforms).

It is furthermore striking that the military force of the 1950s revolutionaries, largely comprised of Nepali Congress followers, bore the same name—People's Liberation Army (Jana Mukti Sena)—as the force of Maoist guerrillas in 1996–2006. While both revolutionary forces were fighting against the status quo associated with preceding political regimes, the paradox is that the revolutionaries of the 1950s turned out to be the 'reactionaries' against whom Maoist guerrillas were fighting half a century later. Given the continuities present in Nepali history, it may come as no surprise that Maoist revolutionaries or the section of them which is represented by UCPN(M), or more recently the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), are now seen as betrayers of the revolutionary cause by the former hardliner group , Nepal Communist Party–Maoist Revolutionary (CPN-M), or more recently the Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (CPN[M]). After the 2017 elections, the erstwhile revolutionaries headed by Prachanda joined their former 'enemies', the Communist Party of Nepal–United Marxist Leninist (UML), in forming the government.

The history of Nepal can thus be interpreted as a series of unfinished revolutions and the failure of the Nepali state to alleviate the entrenched inequalities that characterize political, economic, and social life in the country. In contrast to India, where the post-colonial state made the issues of caste and tribe discrimination a focal point of the constitution-making process in the early 1950s, the modified version of the Muluki Ain of 1962 in Nepal, while making all citizens equal before the law, still maintained some clauses that made caste discrimination possible (the right to observe the traditions of one's group). Yet it is important to note that despite the existence of

the partyless *panchayat* regime from 1962 until 1990, Nepal was undergoing quite a rapid modernization process—introduction of modern institutions, such as schools, hospitals, building of roads, and basic infrastructure projects. As noted by some scholars, Maoist insurgency took off precisely in the areas that experienced the benefits of modernization and were exposed to the influence of schools, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or international donor agencies (Leve 2009). In the 1970s, the Maoist base area was, for instance, the seat of the so-called Rapti Development Integrated Project, funded by USAID (for details see Paudel 2012).

The most recent revolution, known as the People's War, was initiated by the CPN(M) in February 1996 in the districts of Rolpa, Rukum, and Gorkha.<sup>10</sup> It was fought under the banner of Maoism at a time when the world had witnessed the demise of communism throughout the world. Extreme structural inequalities, suppression of indigenous people, and rising numbers of disenfranchised youth led Nickson (2003) and Mikesell (2003) to predict the possibility of an unfolding Peruvian revolutionary scenario in Nepal several years before the start of insurgency. In 1996, Maoists put forward a forty-point demand to the government, which asked for an end to racial (caste and ethnic) discrimination, land reform, and 'establishment of a people's democratic system' (Forty Point Demand by UPF, in Hutt 2004c: 285), which resonated with the grievances and aspirations of large sections of the Nepali rural population. The role of the indigenous question (de Sales 2000; Pettigrew 2003; Lecomte-Tilouine 2004a), as well as the failure of successive governments to deliver expectations, heightened by the abolition of the autocratic *panchayat* regime in 1990 (Whelpton 2005; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2004; Gellner 2003; Hutt 2004b) have been discussed as the factors behind the spread of insurgency in Nepal. However, researchers have emphasized the importance of looking beyond socio-economic explanations and into the role of Maoist ideology (Ramirez 2004; S. Shah 2004; Fujikura 2003), local histories and power struggles (de Sales 2000; Turin and Shneiderman 2004; Leve 2005; Gersony 2003), and the strength of the Maoist organization and its mobilization strategies.

The evolution of the Maoist movement, which expanded from less than 200 core members in 1995 to the army of up to 20,000 people by 2006,<sup>11</sup> was quite spectacular. By 2001, the Maoist movement is often cited to have controlled 70

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed descriptions of the history of the CPN(M) and party politics in Nepal, see Ogura (2008b), Hachhethu (2009), and Ramirez (2004).

<sup>11</sup> The exact number of combatants is unknown. In the wake of the conflict, United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) registered 19,602 combatants (Singh 2012). However, the leader of the Maoists, Prachanda, infamously admitted that many of those who got into cantonments were not former PLA. Many of the real combatants never made it to the

per cent of rural Nepal, though the notion of control itself is highly tenuous. The success of the Maoists is often attributed to the organizational structure of the movement, the Maoist strategy of protracted guerrilla warfare, and the weakness of the Nepali state (Lecomte-Tilouine 2009a). The Maoists were waging a classical example of non-conventional guerilla warfare, which had very little to do with the so-called new wars of the post-Cold War era (Richards 2005). Not only were Nepali Maoists carefully studying Mao's strategy of 'protracted guerilla warfare', they were also drawing inspiration from a thousand-year-old treatise, *the Art of War* by Sun Tzu, and learning from the mistakes of the Shining Path of Peru.

One of the things the Maoists learned from the Shining Path of Peru is the error of indulging in indiscriminate violence towards civilians a path that inevitably alienates people. Despite the fact that there were cases of indiscriminate violence from both sides of the conflict in Nepal and some indication that Maoists used symbolic violence to instil a 'culture of fear' (Lecomte-Tilouine 2009b; S. Shah 2008; Pettigrew and Adhikari 2009), the scale of violence during the ten years of the People's War of Nepal can hardly be compared to any of the so-called new wars. According to the most recent estimates, 17,625 people were killed during the war, with the majority having been killed by the state. A further 1,300 people were 'disappeared', most of them by the state (*Nepal Monitor* 2011). If one compares the figure of 18,000 over a period of ten years of the war, with four to six coffins with dead migrant workers arriving on a daily basis in post-conflict Nepal, one can see that international labour migration to such states as Malaysia or those in the Gulf can be as physically and structurally violent as the civil war.

Nepal's Maoist movement was unique in its ability to build popular support in much of rural Nepal. By rendering their ideology as relevant for the real-life issues of people in rural Nepal (Turin and Shneiderman 2004; Shneiderman 2009b) and by offering a revolutionary vision of the future which appealed to various sections of society (Fujikura 2003), the Maoists mobilized support of different groups of people. Unlike some guerilla movements, particularly in Africa, that could rely on a pull of lootable mineral resources, be it diamonds or oil, Maoists, especially at the beginning of the war, had to rely on the meagre resources provided by the people in their base area (and on the weapons looted in the course of the first military offences).<sup>12</sup> Hence

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cantonments, working in different party structures after the war (the Young Communist League being an example) and migrating abroad instead.

<sup>12</sup> *Yartsagumba*, a caterpillar fungus that grows in highland valleys and whose value in the international markets is more than that of gold, could be considered one of the primary sources of revenue that Maoists relied on during the war. Thus, Maoists controlled the Maikot village development committee (VDC) and the Dolpa district, famous for the production

building relationships with civilians and winning the 'hearts' of people was central to the Maoist strategy of waging the civil war. By forging relations with ordinary peasants, Maoists were ensuring the existence of a secure rearward where they could exercise people's power, generate resources for the needs of war, that is, collect taxes and grain, conduct trainings for the PLA, and regroup before major military battles.

Given that the Maoist movement started as a relatively small group at the start of the war—with only thirty-six Maoist activists attacking the police post in Rolpa, and with the rifles that were bought from the Tibetan Khampa rebels in the 1980s (Adhikari 2014: 37)—the scale of its organizational structure was quite impressive by the end of the war. As explained by Shneiderman and Turin (2004), the Maoist movement was in essence a social movement. Far from being limited to its military wing, that is, the PLA, the Maoist movement was composed of multiple departments: cultural troupes that spread the Maoist message through songs and theatre, teams of 'barefoot doctors' that catered for the wounded PLA fighters, political motivation teams that engaged in door-to-door campaigns spreading the Maoist ideology, village-level militias that maintained 'law and order' in rural localities controlled by the Maoists, and so on. The range of the Maoist unions—at least in their base area—makes it possible to talk about the existence of the Maoist People's Front during the war. From Children's Organization to the Student Union, from Women's and Dalits' to Teachers' and Peasants' Unions—not a single person was left outside the Maoist enterprise. In short, while still maintaining a relatively small number of whole-timers at its core, the Maoist movement could draw on a huge 'army' of part-timers, that is, people who did not go 'underground' and were living seemingly 'normal lives' while supporting the Maoists for a whole number of reasons, which, as will be shown further, often had little to do with the Maoist ideology per se. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that most of the Maoist unions, contrary to what might be assumed, were key in maintaining the Maoist economy of war, not only spreading its ideology.

The solution to the conflict was found neither through peace talks (2001, 2003) nor through military conquest. The royal massacre in 2001, in which ten members of the Nepal royal family were killed, including king Birendra, can be said to have really played into the hands of the Maoists. The new king made a series of highly unpopular moves, which earned him enemies not only in Nepal but also across the border in India. King Gyanendra's decision to dismiss the elected prime minister in October 2003 and seize full power in a coup on 1 February 2005 helped the

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of *yartsagumba*. According to some accounts, the control of the *yartsagumba* trade and its taxation was one of the major sources of Maoist revenue closer to the end of the war.

Maoists to achieve their cause. The formation of the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) that commenced talks with CPN(M) in India and the emergence of the 2006 April Movement which opposed the state of emergency were landmark events that helped the underground Maoists to come forward and strike a deal with the SPA against the monarch.<sup>13</sup> Even though Maoists did not achieve power through military conquest, the satisfaction of their demand for a Constituent Assembly and the abolition of the monarchy in 2006 can be taken as a sign that their agenda became victorious. After the Constituent Assembly elections in 2008, CPN(M) emerged as the biggest political party. The first action of the newly elected body was to declare Nepal a secular republic on the 28 May 2008. Though they had the mandate to draft a new constitution, the political parties within the Constituent Assembly failed to come to a consensus on a number of issues, most notably on the question of ethnic federalism, even after the term of the Constituent Assembly had been extended four times and had reached four years.

The 2013 elections for a new Constituent Assembly came as an unexpected blow to the UCPN(M): it took only the third place, having lost votes to both its former rivals, the Nepali Congress (NC) and Communist Party of Nepal–United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML). It is particularly striking that in the 2013 elections the Kathmandu valley exhibited not only an anti-Maoist vote but also a pro-monarchy and anti-secular vote, having opted for the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party–Nepal in the proportional part of the vote. In contrast, people in the former Maoist base area voted for the UCPN(M), despite their evident disappointment with the Maoist leaders.<sup>14</sup> The conservative voting pattern in Kathmandu can be taken as a ‘resurgence of tradition’ and nostalgia of the metropolitan-based population for the ‘orderly’ times of the monarchy—‘orderly’ as far as the urban areas are concerned. Inasmuch as the vote in Kathmandu was anti-Maoist, it was also anti-change. Likewise, the vote in the former Maoist base area was arguably not quite pro-Maoist but rather pro-change and pro-development. I suggest that the no-confidence vote in relation to UCPN(M) should be taken as a vote against the performance of the party, its leaders

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<sup>13</sup> It is crucial to note the role of the Indian state in the peace process between the former guerrillas and mainstream political parties. For details, see Hachhethu and Gellner (2010).

<sup>14</sup> Thabang boycotted the 2013 elections, following the call of the hardliner group within the Maoists, CPN–MR (led by M. Vaidya). Allegedly, the boycott initiated by the Vaidya group contributed to the poor overall results of the Maoists. However, the boycott itself was highly contentious, with sufficient data showing that it was forcefully enforced in many areas of the former Maoist stronghold. During the 2017 elections, most Thabangis cast their votes following the Prachanda faction, with the call for boycott by the Biplov faction having been neglected. For more details see Chapter 2.

in parliamentary politics,<sup>15</sup> and single identity federalism (Tamang 2013), but not against the values and ideas that the Maoist movement championed during the war.

In 2015, the new Constituent Assembly adopted a constitution that has been interpreted by many analysts as a step back in comparison with the Interim Constitution of 2007. The limitations in the 2015 Constitution should not blind one to the multiple examples of positive change as experienced in the concrete realities of people's lives. The rise of ethnic groups, Dalits, and women in the public arena is one of the most obvious examples of such change. Even though changes in these domains are often discounted as mere symbolic gains in the game of identity politics, this book seeks to show that the People's War became a catalyst for profound transformation not only in the symbolic recognition of earlier excluded groups but also in the *working* of the key hierarchies structuring Nepali society—those of caste and tribe, gender and generation, and Hinduism as a dominant religion and state ideology.

### **'Rules That Apply in Times of Crisis'**

In order to understand why the civil war is considered such a deeply transformative event in the imaginary of people in the Maoist base area, I suggest that one needs to account for a different quality of the wartime. Despite the pervasiveness of structural violence<sup>16</sup> and several cases of military violence in the Maoist base area before the war, it was only with the beginning of the conflict that people had to live in a situation of war on a daily basis. War and its concurrent characteristics—uncertainty, liminality, loss of stability<sup>17</sup>—became chronic, forming the context within which people had to take decisions about where to live (in the village or close to the jungle), where to send children to study (to distant towns or the native

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<sup>15</sup> Widespread corruption within the party, perceived betrayal of the causes of the revolution, dubious re-integration of former Maoist combatants into Nepal's army (only 1,400 out of 29,000 former Maoist combatants made it to the state army), and contentious policies of the Maoist government in Kathmandu (eviction of slums along the Bagmati River and the widening of the ring road) were among some of the reasons that eroded the Maoist base both inside the Kathmandu Valley and beyond.

<sup>16</sup> The term 'structural violence', coined by Johan Galtung, refers to violence caused by social institutions rather than by military forces or physical abuse. Thus, in the case of Nepal, instances of discrimination based on caste, gender, and ethnicity could all be considered forms of structural violence that people had to deal with on a daily basis.

<sup>17</sup> On uncertainty in times of revolution and its impact on the ideological choices that people make, see A. Shah (2009); on liminality as an important term for analysing revolutions, see Thomassen (2012).

village), and whether to send them to school at all. Rather than using the term ‘war’ (*yuddha*), people in the Maoist base area referred to the conflict as the ‘time/age of war’ (*dwandwa-kaal* or *yuddha-kaal*) or the ‘time/age of trouble (emergency)’ (*sankat-kaal*), differentiating it from the ‘time of peace’ (*shanti-kaal*). The term *kaal*, which can stand either for *time*, *fate*, or *untimely death*, hints at a distinct nature of the wartime and its ‘exceptional’ nature, which humans cannot control but rather surrender to and act within its limits.

Unlike some important ethnographic studies of conflict which theorized war zones as distinct spaces, that is warscapes (Hoffman and Lubkemann 2005; Nordstrom 1997; Korf 2012), this book argues that the temporal dimension of wars—the nature of the wartime—is crucial for understanding the behaviour of people in conflict zones and the scope of transformation triggered by the conflict. While acknowledging the false dichotomy between ‘normal’ and ‘exceptional’ times, I demonstrate that it is only by accounting for a different quality of the wartime—when different rules apply—that one can explain the scope of transgressions and change triggered by the conflict in Nepal.

While using the notion of ‘exceptional’ times, I do not suggest that war zones are spaces where everyday life and social norms are suspended and trust is lost. Neither does this concept imply that the lives of people in war zones are determined solely by exceptional experiences of violence, forced displacement, or fear. Instead, it stresses that ordinary social life—be it caring for kin and earning a livelihood, marrying, or burying the dead—is invariably influenced by a different logic, that of war, which forces people to adapt to new circumstances and adopt new rules, reneging on social practices taken for granted in the past. The notion of ‘exceptional’ times also points to the fact that the state of exception is not always localized in distinct spaces created by the state, such as concentration camps or detention centres for terrorist suspects or refugees, but can also be found in ordinary spaces where it operates ‘as an unlocalizable process of transformation’ (Belcher et al. 2008).

Drawing on the Hindu notion of *apaddharma*—‘rules that apply in times of crisis’—I suggest that the temporal dimension of wars is crucial for understanding the wartime reversal of well-established norms and the breaking of taboos on a scale untypical for the ‘normal’ times of peace. While war is a paradigmatic situation, using Zigon’s term, of ‘moral breakdown’ when people are forced to ‘step-away from their unreflective everydayness and think-through, figure-out, work on themselves and respond to certain ethical dilemmas’ (Zigon 2007: 140), the kind of (un)ethical choices people in war zones make cannot be understood outside a distinct wartime temporality, and the morality of these choices cannot be judged by the norms of ‘ordinary times’ either.

In contrast to much Western philosophy which analyses the state of exception as a space where laws are suspended and human life is reduced to 'bare life' (Agamben 2005), the traditional Hindu system of law has a special concept for dealing with 'exceptional' times—*apaddharma*—pointing towards the centrality of a temporal, and not just spatial, dimension of social life:

This is the mechanism of *apad*, which may be translated 'in extremity', an emergency when normal rules do not apply, when all bets are off. *Apad* is further supplemented by other loophole concepts such as adversity (*anaya*), distress (*arti*), and near-starvation (*ksudha*). In a famine a father may kill his son (10.105) and, far worse, priests may eat dogs (which would otherwise make them 'dog-cookers', a common term of opprobrium for Untouchables). (Doniger 1992: 36)

By sanctioning transgressions in times of emergency, the traditional Hindu law recognizes not only the varied nature of time, but also the ways in which it bears on human action. Far from being a thing unto itself, time becomes a constituent element of people's social and moral worlds, which leads to a different approach both to morality and law. Unlike in the Western system of law where exceptions are exemptions from the universal, in the traditional Hindu legal system law is particularistic and context-sensitive. According to Ramanujan (1989: 46), 'To be moral, for Manu [the creator of the most famous Hindu legal code], is to particularize—to ask who did what, to whom and when.' What is right depends on one's social position and one's nature, on the locality, and on *the nature of the time* when the law should be exercised (Ramanujan 1989: 48). Thus, traditional Hindu law distinguished between '*asramadharmā* (the conduct which is right for one's stage of life), *svadharmā* (the conduct that is right for one's station, *jati* or class, or *svabhava* or given nature), and *apaddharma* (conduct that is necessary in times of distress or emergency ...)' (ibid.).

The notion of 'rules that apply in times of crisis' gives an important insight into understanding the scope of transgressions happening in war zones. While some of the wartime transgressions in Nepal, such as consumption of previously taboo kinds of meat, might be taken as a reduction of life to *zoe*—'a state of being common to all animals' (Redfield 2005: 330), the concept of 'rules that apply in times of crisis' demonstrates that what constitutes life and what constitutes one's *dharma* (duty) differ depending on the nature of the time one inhabits. It also shows that universalizing laws might become redundant during 'exceptional' times, because universal laws are modelled on a 'normal' average subject living in 'normal' times, not the one suffering from hunger, displacement, or persecution.

The concept of *apaddharma* shows that in the situation of war, even those actions which might be viewed as agential in the sense of power or resistance

(Ortner 2006a: 144)—such as providing support to guerrillas or resisting the state—often conceal actors’ starkly different intentions or motivations. For instance, what is often taken as people’s agentic resistance towards the state in the Maoist base area was in fact a fulfilment of one’s duty towards one’s kin and one’s community. People had to find moral ways of fulfilling their obligations, obligations that often led people to make choices that would hardly be considered plausible during the ‘normal’ times of peace. By invoking the category ‘moral’, I refer not to abstract ideas about good and bad or virtuous projects centred on the self, but rather to the materiality of ethical dilemmas faced by the old and young, male and female, during the war and its aftermath, such as to join the Maoists or migrate, to bury the dead according to the usual rites and risk being caught by the police or bury the dead ‘as animals’ without any rituals, to support guerrillas with in-kind donations at a time when food was scarce and to slaughter cows, animals that until recently had been venerated as sacred in Nepal (and are still venerated by many Hindus).

By transgressing norms, people were not only saving their lives but also fulfilling their duty (*dharmā*): by eating beef high-caste Maoists were fulfilling the duty of the revolutionary fighter, by killing cows people were fulfilling the duty of caring for and feeding their kin, by eating with lower-caste people the villagers were preserving the cohesion of the community that was being persecuted by the state. Young people in the Maoist movement had to live a life of double ‘exception’, that is, not only temporal but also spatial. With the Maoist movement having been based on rules and norms that transgressed most accepted hierarchies and conventions, Maoist whole-timers had to follow the rules of the underground Maoist universe—the egalitarian and radical praxis, which was possible only during the ‘exceptional’ times of war. In short, acts which could be seen as transgressive under the ‘normal’ times of peace acquired a moral dimension during the ‘exceptional’ times of war, largely because they were part of fulfilling people’s *dharmā*, that is, duties and responsibilities, and were part of accommodating to the ‘rules that apply in times of crisis’.

Using the notions of ‘rules that apply in times of crisis’, I seek to understand what happens when the crisis is over. Do the norms instituted by the Maoists, and the transgressions incurred as part of the ‘exceptional’ times of war, outlive the very crisis that has caused them? Understanding how and whether wartime social processes translate into the contours of post-conflict society is one of the key questions of this book, because wartime changes do not always lead to transformative processes in the wake of war. Thus, the post-conflict situation has often been described in terms of a ‘resurgence of tradition’ (West 2005). Similarly, in post-conflict Nepal, there are some traces of life going ‘back to normal’. Even

though the practice of untouchability declined during the war (Bennet and Bannon 2004), stricter rules of inter-caste commensality ensued immediately after the end of the conflict (Lecomte-Tilouine 2013: 245). 'Resurgence of tradition' manifested itself even in the Maoist base area, where villages repudiated the Maoist ban on performing animal sacrifices as part of religious worship (Lecomte-Tilouine 2009b; de Sales 2009). While these setbacks might be interpreted as a return to the pre-war status quo, it is clear that the meaning of these practices, enacted in the aftermath of conflict, is starkly different from their meaning in pre-war times. For instance, today the performance of communal animal sacrifices often stands for ethnic rather than religious revival—with the practice of sacrifice taking on the meaning of a cultural display rather than a means of propitiating gods, as it was before the war (de Sales 2011). Likewise, while caste boundaries are reintroduced, the lower position of Dalits is no longer taken as a 'natural' order of things. The rigidifying of caste boundaries and the increase in violent cases of caste discrimination after the war represents a higher-caste backlash against profound changes in inter-caste interactions triggered by the war, not a return to the pre-war situation.

Hence, in examining the aftermath of conflict, this book focuses not on the matter-of-fact preservation of the old, or acceptance of the new norms and practices, but rather on exploring how the two interact with one another, and what meanings may be ascribed to practices that often only outwardly represent the 'resurgence of tradition'.

## **The Everyday as a Battleground in Revolutions**

The 'everyday' is as important a site in any revolution as the battlefield, especially if the revolution is inspired by leftist ideology (Bourdieu 1977: 94). Indeed, some of the most crucial 'battles' of the People's War were not about defeating the enemy by military means, but rather, by gaining popular support and legitimacy, creating a distinct set of relationships with civilians, fostering new forms of sociality among its cadres, and ensuring an unwavering support of the population in their base area. Equally important was the struggle over the core values and ideas, which was exemplified by the Maoist project of Cultural Revolution. The goal of any revolutionary process is never the capture of power per se, but rather the transformation of society, with revolution, as noted by Cowan (2010b: 86), coming about not 'after and as a result of victory, but through the process of war itself'. Indeed, Maoist guerrillas in contexts as different as Peru, India, and the Philippines tried to disrupt the social order based on traditional notions of gender, generation, and class, and attempted to change norms governing everyday social relations

during the civil war.<sup>18</sup> By recruiting women and youth into their ranks, by imposing a different vision of morality (including marriage and courtship systems), and by instituting a parallel system of justice (people's courts), by organizing co-operatives and trade unions, Maoist guerrillas essentially tried to implement their vision of a 'new' society and instil a new system of values in the totality of people's lives.

Therefore, the focus on the military strategy of guerrilla movements and their use of violence alone is often misplaced. For instance, while waging multiple military campaigns, Maoist revolutionaries in Nepal organized a network of people's governments, which tried to rearrange the rhythms and practices of everyday life in rural Nepal. They attempted to transform the annual festival cycle, banning communal religious worship and introducing Maoist festivals instead. They also tried to regulate major life-cycle rituals, ways of courtship and marrying, and even the techniques of animal husbandry. Similar to other Maoist movements, Nepali Maoists invested much effort in transforming not only the key social institutions such as caste or property relations but also the less important traces of culture: from ways of greeting to ways of adorning one's body, with an emphasis on Maoist greetings (the red salute) in the first case and on frugality and asceticism in the second.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that during my fieldwork in 2011 it was not uncommon to hear older Thabangis complaining that local traditions (*chalan*) were dying out (*purano chalanbaru haraundai jachan, sabai chalan hatyo*). Be it the loss of religious rites or marriage ceremonies, seasonal festivals or ritual dancing with elements of martial arts (*nachauru*)—all of it was blamed on Maoists and the People's War. Even when Maoists had nothing to do with the demise of certain traditions, as in the case of *nachauru*, the loss was still associated with the advent of the Maoist epoch. Insofar as the local Maoists were perceived as agents of change, they were also perceived as destroyers of tradition. However, the Maoists were nothing but the latest avatars of the agents of modernity, fixated on the idea of improving the local culture (*sbuddhar*) and releasing people from the thrall of 'backward' mentality. Maoist policies were part of a long-standing 'will to improve', to borrow T.M. Li's term (2007),<sup>19</sup> which characterized the well-meaning civilizing drive of actors as diverse as state officials, development workers, teachers, political activists, and retired Gurkha soldiers in Nepal over the last half a century (Pigg 1992).

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<sup>18</sup> For an account of the Maoist movement in the Philippines, see Jones (1989), for that in India, see A. Shah (2010) and Kunnath (2012), and for Peru, see Degregori (1991) and Starn (1995).

<sup>19</sup> See T.M. Li (2007) on the 'will to improve', that is, development actors' efforts to transform the so-called primitive people in Indonesia.

In essence, one could argue that the transformative zeal of Maoists aimed to change the habitus—the system of thoughts, perceptions, and schemas of perception and action—typical of people inhabiting both rural and urban Nepal.<sup>20</sup> It is not coincidental that Nepali Maoists, like other Maoist movements, were led by university-trained intellectuals who had an explicit theory of social change.<sup>21</sup> However benevolent their theory might seem—aspiring to empower the oppressed and enlighten the ‘backward’—it is based on the idea that education, progress, and modernity are key to the betterment of the human condition.

The transformative drive of Maoist guerrillas and their vision of a utopian future is starkly manifested in the idiom of ‘new man’, ‘new life’, and ‘new Nepal’, so frequently used by former members of the Maoist movement. During the war, the idea of a ‘new man’ wielded power over the minds of people, especially youth, because the aim of transforming oneself is arguably a much more plausible goal than an overarching goal of transforming society (Zharkevich 2009a). Discussing revolutionary regimes aimed at creating ‘new man’, Bourdieu makes an important point that revolutionary movements are able to instil new kinds of subjectivities through changing people’s bodily habits, not just their minds (1977: 94):

If all societies and, significantly, all the ‘totalitarian institutions’, in Goffman’s phrase, that seek to produce a new man through a process of ‘deculturation’ and ‘reculturation’ set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners*, the reason is that, treating the body as memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, that is, mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture. The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit....

While the Maoist wartime regime of governance aimed at ‘deculturation’ and ‘reculturation’ was rife with bans, court proceedings, and ideological training sessions which aimed to transform people’s consciousness, it was through practice—new ways of doing everyday life, and habituation to previously

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the Shining Path of Peru, whose successors the Nepali Maoists claim to be, also viewed indigenous people, living in high-altitude areas of Peru, as somewhat ‘backward’ and in need of being enlightened (Starn 1995).

<sup>21</sup> Thus, the ideologue of the Shining Path of Peru was a philosophy professor, Aníbal Guzmán, and the intellectual leader of Nepali Maoists was Dr Baburam Bhattarai.



unthinkable acts—that people revolutionized the everyday and reconfigured rigid social hierarchies, without having intended to do so.

In particular, the praxis in the Maoist movement, defined by egalitarian modes of sociality that cut across gender, class, and caste divides, created, using William's concept, a new 'structure of feeling'—not just a new way of thinking about the world, inseparable from a new set relationships and social experiences. It is as a result of a whole range of new qualitative experiences of being and relating that Maoist whole-timers as well as people in the base area developed a new kind of practical consciousness, which, as shown by Williams (1977), saturated 'the whole process of living—not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships....' The total way of life of the Maoist whole-timers, which collapsed the boundaries between the personal and the political, between the public and the private, in which fraternal bonds of the fellow-comrades got transformed into relationships of intimacy and eventually kinship, allowed for the emergence of a new 'structure of feeling' within the Maoist universe, the traces of which survived the 'exceptional times of war' and captured the social imagination even in the post-war Nepali society.



## Changing Habitus in Times of War: Generation and Conflict

Wars are known to have a deeply transformative impact on social structures (Donham 1999; Hutchinson 1996; Englund 2002; Lubkemann 2008), but how exactly do social structures become transformed over a decade of violent conflict? How can we trace the change as it is happening in real lives?

While Bourdieu's 'habitus' has been criticized for being over-deterministic and incapable of accounting for processes of social change (Archer 2010; Noble and Watkins 2003; Sewell 1992), it appears that the notion of habitus in some discussions has been divorced from the notions of practice and embodiment, which have been central to Bourdieu's work. Both concepts allow one to overcome the rigid dichotomy between objective and subjective structures, to bridge the gap between the micro and macro level of people's lives and see how the micro level of people's everyday lives produces wider social structures while being produced by them. These concepts allow one to see the dynamic rather than static nature of habitus.

In his later work Bourdieu noted that habitus is bound to change in a situation of crisis or sudden transformation (Bourdieu 2000a: 161). Crisis is understood not only as some disaster or sociopolitical upheaval, but also situations when individuals go through different life-stages, or are exposed to new kinds of learning and spatial environment, noting that the situation of crisis is qualitatively different from

that of the usual life transitions, such as starting a university degree or migratory experiences. For Bourdieu, abrupt transformations or a situation of crisis cause a disjuncture between the objective structures and the established habitus of people, often resulting in the emergence of a new set of dispositions:

Habitus changes constantly in response to new experiences. Dispositions are subject to a kind of permanent revision, but one which is never radical, because it works on the basis of the premises established in a previous state.... In situations of crisis or sudden change, especially those seen at the time of abrupt encounters between civilizations linked to the colonial situation or too-rapid movements in social space, agents often have difficulty in holding together the dispositions associated with different states, and some of them, often those who were best adapted to the previous state of the game, have difficulty in adjusting to the new established order. Their dispositions become dysfunctional and the efforts they may make to perpetuate them help them to plunge them deeper into failure. (Bourdieu 2000a: 161)

The situation of war can be said to be a prime example of a crisis that is bound to transform people's habitus, and that revolutionary movements are among prime agents seeking to transform it. But what kind of habitus do they try to transform?

The conflict in Nepal can be interpreted as a battle over values and rules which would define a new order: the battle in which everything that was hailed as 'traditional' and 'reactionary' had to give way to what was viewed as 'modern' and 'progressive'. While the conflict in Nepal, as most recent violent conflicts throughout the world, had a clear generational dimension (Abbink and Kessel 2005; Boyden and Berry 2005; Utas 2008; Vigh 2006), it should not be understood exclusively as a form of generational struggle in which people belonging to different age-cohorts were fighting each other or were only trying to corrode generational hierarchies (for there were elders among the revolutionaries, and youth among the anti-Maoist forces). Rather, as argued by Bourdieu, the generational struggle of children against parents is nothing more than a war against a certain type of habitus, which embodies implicit rules and principles, alien to the new generation: '... generation conflicts oppose not age-classes separated by natural properties, but habitus which have been produced by different modes of generation' (Bourdieu 1977: 78). Thus, when during the war Maoist youth were destroying vessels containing alcohol, forcibly entering the houses of the higher-caste elders, or challenging the power of the priests, they were not opposing individual elders but rather trying to redefine the habitus, the implicit rules and norms governing the everyday social practice that was typical of the generation that came of age in different historical times.

Such a perspective on generation allows one to approach it as an embodied social structure, defined by a particular set of dispositions, schemas of perception, and bodily practices. According to Mannheim's theory of generation, each generation exhibits the worldview that stems from early impressions of childhood and youth, and which constitutes later in life a *natural* view of the world (Mannheim 1964: 177).<sup>22</sup> Mannheim explains the importance of early impressions' through the notion of 'fresh contact': the point at which generations come to know the accumulated heritage of previous generations (Mannheim 1964: 171–172). Essentially, one could argue that what Mannheim refers to as an 'original set,' against which people's later experiences of life acquire a meaning, is similar to 'habitus produced by different modes of generations' in Bourdieu.<sup>23</sup> The notion of generational habitus acquires particular salience during the times of important historical events, which have been shown to shape distinct social generations.<sup>24</sup>

The Maoist People's War gave birth to a distinct historical generation: the generation whose formative years and 'fresh contact' coincided with the times of war. It also gave birth to a new structure of feeling, characterized by hitherto inexperienced modes of egalitarian interaction. Growing up in the midst of the war and in the centre of the guerrilla stronghold had a profound impact on young people's ways of thinking and acting in the world. To see the cleavage that separates different social generations in Thabang one does not need to question elders and youth about their system of beliefs. It is sufficient to see what they wear, eat, and drink, with whom they share

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<sup>22</sup> Mannheim's theory of generation and his notion of 'fresh contact' have been used by scholars working on youth in a variety of contexts. For instance, see Cole (2004) and Jeffrey (2013).

<sup>23</sup> The notion of generational habitus is especially relevant in societies where the emergence of generations is a fairly recent phenomenon, linked to the introduction of modern institutions such as schools which grade students according to age and socialize them in groups of peers, in contrast to the process of cross-generational socialization in kin groups in the past. The introduction of schooling resulted in the prolongation of childhood and the situation when the experience of schooling became a marker of new divisions within communities. Thus, in the Maoist base area, people can be roughly divided into those who have attended school and those who have no experience of formal schooling. For those who went to school, the experience of schooling became the key factor in acquiring a distinct kind of habitus—the one hailed as 'modern'.

<sup>24</sup> Wars of the twentieth century have formed distinct social generations in Europe, the so-called lost generation of the First World War, and the generation of the Second World War. For a discussion of how particular historical events—be they wars, post-war crisis (as in Germany after the First World War), or post-war prosperity (after the Second World War)—constituted social generations, see Eyerman and Turner (1998) and Pilcher (1994).

food, and how they celebrate festivals. Arguably, in Thabang, generational location was often a more accurate predictor of one's habitus than class or caste.

In the Maoist base area, the perception of change itself was largely shaped by one's generational location. While both youth and elders used the idiom 'changing times', they attached different meanings to it. Whereas older Thabangis often used the Hindu term *yuga*, referring to the present age as an epoch of degeneration or destruction (*kali yuga* or *hatya yuga*), the younger generation or the elders who were educated at school talked about the era of science and computers (*baigyanik jamana* and 'computer' *yug*). However, both the old and the young divided social life into two disparate worlds: that of 'tradition' and that of 'modernity'. The synonyms used to denote these concepts were plentiful: *rudibad*, *andhabishwas*, *paramparabad* (reactionary, superstitious, traditional) stand for 'tradition', whereas *adbunik*, *bikasit*, *baigyanik* (modern, developed, scientific) stand for 'modernity'. While the boundary between 'tradition' and 'modernity' was far from clear-cut, Thabangis tended to associate all that was 'modern' with youth, and all that was 'traditional' with elders and middle-aged women. The divide, even though it was highly simplistic on closer examination, lay along generational lines or 'age imaginaries' (Alexander 2013) within the community, which ascribed to each group a propensity to think and act in a distinct way.

### **Embodied Change in Times of War**

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of embodiment, I treat social structures—be it caste, generation, or class—as embodied phenomena which get actualized, formed, and transformed through practice. Rather than taking social structures as an aggregate and as a fixed form, I approach social structures as imbued with human agency through the medium of practice. For instance, in order to understand the complexity involved in changing social practices related to caste, we need to take into account the embodied dimension of both generation and caste, and embodied practices which constitute the reality of these social structures in everyday life. While caste has often been posited as a state of mind, I illustrate further that it is also a distinct state of the body. Caste is not just a structure determined by ideology, kinship, or occupation, but also a bodily experience of walking in particular ways, of eating food in distinct places, and eating particular kinds of food (Gorringe and Rafanell 2007). By considering caste and generation as embodied phenomena, I aim to shift the analysis from the meta-narrative of social structures, existing separately from individual people and their biological bodies, to the ways in which social structures are inscribed in human bodies and the ways in which the two constitute each other.

The notions of embodiment and practice bring an important corrective to top-down theories of change that focus largely on macro-processes of growth, economic structures, and globalization, neglecting the micro-processes of change, and the processes through which change becomes actualized through people's practice, bottom-up so to say. It allows one to conceive of human beings as being thoroughly social and think of social structures as being inseparable from human beings, their practices and choices. Not only does it bridge the artificial dichotomy of agency and structure but also illuminates that inasmuch as people embody the social structures, historical times, relationships of domination, and so on, structures themselves have a reality only insofar as people keep producing them through their everyday practice and biological bodies. As shown by Comaroff and Comaroff (1992: 90), the central role that all kinds of social reformers have accorded to the role of the body in their efforts to remake history, including Nepali Maoists, derives from the position of the body as a 'mediator between the self and world', with the body encoding 'the categories and processes that shape social systems and the subjects they presuppose.'

While an important body of anthropological work has focused on the ways in which history and political processes get interiorized in people's bodies, so that the collective past is embodied through individual bodies in the now (Kleinman and Kleinman 1994; Fassin 2007), this book illustrates that in particular cases—such as breaking the taboos on inter-caste commensality or beef-eating—the change in individual bodily practices might amount to a change in the social structure, not the other way round. It is not only that the social and the political get inscribed into the body, but also that people's bodily practices and everyday acts constitute the social, make up and sustain social hierarchies, and legitimize the norms and dogmas of a given society. For instance, had it not been for embodied experiences of pain and torture during the war, inter-caste commensality and beef-eating, being healed after conversion to Christianity, or being related to the Maoist movement by blood, people in the former Maoist base areas would hardly have been able to interiorize new ideas at the level of practice.

It was via the process of 'embodied change' that the process of social transformation worked. When I asked people in the Maoist base area about how such extraordinary transformation in a wide range of social practices became possible in less than a decade, people replied to me that they had simply acquired the *habit (bani)* of eating beef, the *habit* of religious worshipping at home, the *habit* of ploughing the fields (women). While Thabangis used the term in a folkloristic way, their point has important theoretical implications for understanding the process of social change: the importance of considering not only self-conscious but also habitual action and understanding how a coping mechanism at one stage is transformed into habitual action later.

The importance of habit lies in its capacity to constitute the social world and perpetuate the hierarchies people are trapped into. As argued by Comaroff and Comaroff (2009: 31), reconfiguring the everyday routine practices has been at the core of different social reformers' programmes, because it is through the 'residual, naturalized quality of habit that power takes up residence in culture, insinuating itself, apparently without agency, in the texture of a life-world'. Weber (2013: 231) made a similar point in noting that the 'inertia of the habitual' is central for understanding the tenacity of structures of domination, which, according to him, are often based 'on the belief in the inviolability of what has always been'.

As this book demonstrates further, the People's War and the Maoist movement in Nepal broke the power of the habitual and forced people to overcome the inertia of the practices they had been taking for granted in the past. People started questioning what was previously viewed as a natural state of things: the supremacy of higher castes, the sacredness of the cow, the 'backward' nature of tribal groups, the inferiority of women in public domains, and so on. In other ways, in instilling new social practices—such as beef-eating, abstinence from alcohol, acts of inter-caste commensality, women ploughing the fields and travelling on par with men, and so on—ten years of the People's War unsettled the *doxa*, that which appeared to be self-evident, and shattered the belief in the inviolability of laws that have been passed down from the 'ancestors'—one of the strongest justifications for much of everyday action in rural Nepal until recently.

Social theorists as different as Durkheim and Weber have stressed the habitual, not self-conscious, nature of human behaviour—a perspective that has been lacking from some of the recent social science theories that have been preoccupied with celebrating the agency of humans. The habitual nature of human action that has been elegantly incorporated into Bourdieu's theory had been alluded to by Durkheim who argued that people act most of the time 'under the sway of habit'. According to Durkheim,

it is not enough to direct our attention to the superficial portion of our consciousness; for the sentiments, the ideas which come to the surface are not, by far, those which have the most influence on our conduct. What must be reached are the habits; the tendencies which have been established gradually in the course of our past life or which heredity has bequeathed to us—these are the real forces which govern us. (Durkheim 1956: 152)

Durkheim's point is important in arguing that most human actions cannot be explained by self-declared ideas or postulated adherence to a certain system of beliefs. Such a position is pertinent not only to the so-called simple societies, where

most local customs and ways of acting are attributed to the ‘tradition passed down from the ancestors’ (*purkhadekhi aeko chalan*), regarded as a source of legitimacy for any social act sanctioned by this tradition, but also in ‘modern’ complex societies where people usually do not question the foundation of their everyday practice and are tempted to think of everything as their own individual choices, accomplishment, or part of their individuality, as though individuality existed in a vacuum, outside a distinct socio-historical context and temporality.

Understanding change in times of war requires an exploration of the ways in which new habits are acquired and internalized by people, and of the ways in which newly acquired habits might lead to the formation of a new set of dispositions and wider habitus over time. Changing one’s behaviour from the old ways of doing things requires time and a repetition of actions: in other words, habituation. As shown by Noble and Watkins, habitus cannot emerge in any different way than via habituation (2003: 535)—the term which ‘allows us to account for how conscious behaviour can become unconscious’ (*ibid.*) and for how acquiring a new habit leads to a different habitus. Habituation or acquisition of new habits not only foregrounds a new practice in the daily routine of people but also causes a change in people’s cognitive structures: when previously self-conscious conduct is turned into a habitual action, such transformation is often accompanied by change in people’s values. In other words, in some cases, the so-called cognitive dissonance caused by being forced to break taboos—be it venturing out at night in the jungle, consuming taboo foods, or eating with groups with whom you would be traditionally barred from eating—can be overcome only with time and embodied practice.

For ideology to have an impact on people’s everyday lives, it needs to be embodied, that is, accepted at the level of the body, not just cognitively. The power of habit lies in the fact that it defines not only people’s everyday lives but also people’s selves and subjectivities, because habits are in essence a crystallization of a distinct habitus. During the war, and even in its aftermath, people’s sense of the self was defined by what they did, rather than by what they thought: the parties that they supported during the war, what they did for livelihoods, whether they ate beef and pork, whether they abstained from or consumed alcohol, whether they worshipped gods and made sacrifices, or whether they simply professed the ideas of ‘blind belief’. Furthermore, people’s ideas about gender, caste, and ethnicity changed as they were forced into ways of practising gender, caste, and ethnicity in new ways—with ‘revolutionary’ consciousness being a result of praxis. At certain points in time, many of the wartime practices were not routinized actions but rather self-consciously made choices. Yet, with the flow of time, actions such as abstaining from alcohol or eating beef became a habitual action. Crucially, many of these

mundane practices came to define not only people's personal identity but also their ethnic and religious identity, reconfiguring wider social structures.

All of the aforementioned mundane social practices are not just habits but are also part of the wider cultural domain, infused with symbolism, which has been drastically transformed over the years of the war. In examining the change in habits, embodied practices, and mundane social acts—as well as how people resolved the dilemmas they faced during the conflict—this book seeks to portray how a turbulent decade of the People's War triggered a profound reconfiguration of people's life-worlds and cultural symbolism over a relatively short period of time.

### **Book Outline**

The first four chapters of the book explore the historic and social processes through which the Maoist heartland was forged during the war. It pays particular attention to understanding how the Maoist People's War became possible through a distinct set of social relationships between guerrillas, civilians, and the state security forces, between youth who self-consciously chose to join the Maoist movement and their peers who decided to migrate abroad—the divergence in choices boiling down less to sociological factors but more to personal biographies, embodied experience of conflict (torture and repression), and different kinship loyalties. Thus, rather than focusing only on the political economy of war, these chapters demonstrate the centrality of the moral and libidinal economy for the processes of political mobilization and military socialization during the conflict as well as the centrality of Maoist unions in their base area for understanding the Maoist economy of war and the complex nature of popular support.

The next four chapters of the book explore the processes of norm-remaking and social change triggered by the war. Each chapter in this part of the book is organized around the discussion of a set of mundane practices—alcohol-drinking, beef-eating, inter-caste commensality, religious observances—that were on top of the Maoist agenda of Cultural Revolution. Be it the decline of transhumant herding or the normalization of beef-eating, the demise of untouchability or religious worship, people framed the loss of distinct social practices and the changing nature of social relations—between people of different generations and castes, between people and livestock, between people and gods—through the idiom of changeover of epochs. When Thabangis talked about 'the changing times' (*jamana badliyo*), they were essentially commenting on the legacy of the People's War and Maoist ideology and its impact on the transformation of the key structures organizing social relationships in Nepal: tribe, caste, 'sacred cow', and religion. All of these practices

are symbolically and materially linked to the key social structures in Nepal, and thus represent a lens through which one is able to explore the processes of social change.

Chapter 1, 'Thabang: From Remote Village to Revolutionary Myth', reviews the current historiography on Thabang and provides a short background to the Kham Magar ethnic group. While discussing the post-war narrative on Thabang as a 'village of resistance', it illustrates how a study *in* a village exemplifies some of the key dilemmas in the studies of revolutions—the problem of 'ethnographic refusal' (Ortner 1995) and the 'romance of resistance' (Abu-Lughod 1990). It shows that in writing the history from the margins and in trying to revive the revolutionary struggle of distinct groups, it is important to weave together the narratives of different sections of society and the ones that go beyond the ready-made narratives prepared for outsiders. By reviewing the historiography on Thabang and the methods used by different sources, it shows that ethnography is most suited for uncovering the richness and complexity of social and political dynamic within communities that have been at the centre of revolutionary struggle. By describing the author's intellectual journey and fieldwork experience as well as recounting the dilemmas encountered in the field, this chapter shows the ways in which the methodological stance adopted by the researcher impacted on the nature of the analysis and the shape that it took in the end.

Chapter 2, 'The Moral Economy of War: The Making of the Base Area', explores the process through which Thabang was forged as a moral community in a liminal position, de-facto excommunicated from the wider body of the nation. The chapter scrutinizes the notion of popular support towards guerrillas and shows that it involved a more complex interplay of interests and sentiments than ideological affinity, including moral solidarity, kinship allegiances, and compliance with the Maoist regime of power during the war. By drawing on events leading to the outbreak of the war, the chapter shows that notions of justice and morality played an important role in the eyes of the villagers for accepting the war as 'theirs' and the Maoist movement as their government. Through experiences of being expelled from the village, living in the jungle, sharing scarce food, Thabangis formed a normative *communitas* characterized by strong in-group cohesion, egalitarianism, sense of mutuality, and help. By recounting people's narratives of war and their relationships to the Maoist movement, this chapter shows that during 'exceptional' times of war people's agency is inseparable from the wartime temporality, and that it often manifests not only in resistance or in the pursuit of distinct life-projects, but also in fulfilling one's obligations and duty towards the kin and accommodating to the Maoist regime of governance.

Chapter 3, 'Becoming Maoist in a Time of Insurgency', explores the generational dimension of the conflict and the processes through which loosely affiliated young

people became committed revolutionaries who were ready to sacrifice their lives for the Maoist cause. I suggest that the relational and self-consciously educational side of the Maoist movement—its emphasis on egalitarian modes of sociality and self-transformative practices based on rigid disciplinary regime—is central for understanding how the Maoists created an exceptionally potent and motivated revolutionary force. Thus, rather than looking at young people's motivations for joining the Maoists or Maoists' mobilization campaigns, I explore the wartime social processes through which the revolutionaries managed to not only recruit but also retain young people within the ranks of the movement, enjoying an enduring support of its cadres throughout the years of the war. In recounting how young people made decisions to join the Maoists or abstain from the revolutionary struggle, this chapter illuminates the complexity of social factors and personal experiences that led young people to make divergent choices: coming from communist families, having experienced torture, and being unmarried—all important factors in prompting one to choose a Maoist path. Avoiding the reduction of young people who joined the Maoist movement to their sociological background, the chapter illustrates that the quest for existential mobility—the feeling that one is moving forward in life, leading a life of dignity, and has opportunities for meaningful participation in social life—should be taken into account if one wants to understand the sources of motivation that made young people embark on a revolutionary path.

Chapter 4, 'The Marital Economy of War: Reconfiguring Kinship Loyalties and Conjugality', explores why the Maoist people's governments put such an emphasis on regulating marriage and sexuality in the areas under their control and what role libidinal politics and relationships of intimacy played in furthering the Maoist project. In doing so, the chapter presents a more nuanced picture of the generational nature of conflict and shows that these were predominantly *unmarried youth* who joined the rebels, with marital status serving as a protection against the possibility of recruitment into the Maoist movement. While young people were temporarily 'renouncing' their family ties for the duration of the war, unmarried youngsters found a new 'family' in the Maoist movement, with the fictive ties of comrade-in-arms often having transformed into marital bonds. The chapter shows that while trying to eradicate traditional courtship spaces and practices, such as the institution of night dormitory, the Maoist movement itself became a prime site for the consummation of marital unions—many of which were delayed by young people within its ranks, because Maoist youth felt that by marrying, that is, fostering personal rather than party ties, they were betraying the party and the goal of the revolution, in other words, committing what political scientists have termed 'libidinal withdrawal' fraught with the prospect of weakening the revolutionary project.

Chapter 5, ‘Remaking the Tribe: “A Farewell to Bad Traditions”’, explores the Maoist wartime project of uprooting ‘bad traditions’ in the areas under their control. By examining Maoist wartime policies on alcohol-brewing and lavish life-cycle celebrations, the chapter illustrates that the revolutionaries targeted those areas of social life which, in their eyes, contributed to maintaining the image of Kham Magars, the ethnic group inhabiting the Maoist heartland, as a ‘backward’ group of people. Because in Nepal the term ‘alcohol-drinking’ was an official category used by the state to locate multiple ethnic groups at the lower end of the social hierarchy, Maoist policies aimed to elevate the status of the ethnic group while transforming its cultural and bodily practices. In trying to regulate people’s production and consumption of liquor—the substance which for many elderly people was more akin to water rather than merely an intoxicating brew—Maoists aimed to transform not only people’s habits but rather the ‘tribal’ habitus, a system of dispositions and ways of acting associated in the eyes of the Maoists with being ‘primitive’ and narrow-minded. In banning lavish ceremonies and celebrations—such as the name-giving and rice-feeding ceremonies, marriage, and death—where litres of alcohol were consumed, the Maoists were trying to redefine the norms of sociality, relatedness, and what being a Kham Magar meant, a move which inadvertently caused a lot of resentment among various groups of people who felt that the ban amounted to an incursion of the Maoist state into the core of their private and social lives.

Chapter 6, ‘Subverting the “Sacred Cow”: When Beef Becomes Edible’, explores an unprecedented rise of beef-eating practices during the war and the subversion of the principle of the ‘sacred cow’—the key tenet of the moral and legal order in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal. How is it that people in the former Maoist heartland of Nepal internalized ideas and practices that were previously seen as transgressive? Analysing the agency of Maoist activists who self-consciously tried to implement a project of radical social transformation and self-consciously broke the taboo on cow-slaughter and those people who were ‘caught’ in the midst of the Maoist transformative endeavour, being forced to break the taboo as part of the ‘exceptional’ times of war, this chapter explores how the wartime temporality impacts on people’s agency and their ability to make ethical choices. It suggests that the temporal dimension of the wartime ‘when different rules apply’ was crucial in making people break established norms on a scale atypical for the ‘normal’ times of peace, and that people’s motivations for doing so were often radically different, depending on their relationships to the Maoist ideology. Yet, as the chapter illustrates further, many people got habituated to the practice of beef-eating and accepted it as a norm in the aftermath of conflict, pointing towards the power of

embodied change in inscribing new norms in people's bodies while re-inscribing wider social structures at the same time.

Chapter 7, 'When All Castes Become One: Transgressing Caste Boundaries during War', critically examines the contention of people in the Maoist base area that 'there are two castes only: men and women', implying that caste ceased to exist as a sociological and experiential reality of people's lives. Focusing on understanding how the relative demise of untouchability came about—whether this was the result of Maoist policies and name-and-shame courts or whether this was part of people's embodied experience of inter-caste bonding during the war—this chapter shows the centrality of embodiment in transforming such rigid social structures as caste or gender. By comparing inter-caste practices and viewpoints of the old and the young, the chapter approaches caste as an embodied social structure inseparable from people's generational habitus, that is, from the tacit knowledge, dispositions, and bodily practices they internalized during distinct historical times when they were young. Recounting the stark ethical dilemmas of the elderly people who were forced to share food and space with lower-caste Maoist guerrillas during the war, often renegeing on their moral norms, and the ease with which Maoist youth who grew up during the decade of the war adopted new norms of inter-caste commensality, this chapter shows the extent to which people's selves, their practices, and beliefs remain an embodiment of the historical times of their youth. The change in people's beliefs about caste often followed the change in everyday practice, not the other way around, as is often assumed by well-meaning development campaigns.

Drawing on the parable of the 'flight of gods'—the contention of the villagers in the Maoist base area of Nepal that 'Gods have left for their homeland in the Himalayas'—the last chapter, 'When Gods Return to Their Homeland in the Himalayas: Maoism, Religion, and Change', explores the impact of Maoist wartime religious policies on people's religious beliefs and practices. It illustrates that far from being intentional, many changes in religious practices came about as a compulsion to change one's ways during wartime and a compulsion to *accommodate* to Maoist religious policies and to the 'exceptional' times of war. By drawing on the life-history of an elder from the clan of Roka and by recounting dilemmas people faced when trying to follow their religious practices during the war, the chapter illustrates the kind of religious change engendered by the conflict in Nepal: de-sacralisation of once-sacred sites and once-sacred polity, transgression of the boundaries between purity and pollution, increasing privatization of religious practices and the creation of a vacuum in transcendent authority, which in many cases is filled by new religious or quasi-religious movements, such as Christianity and Maoism itself.